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FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

Agreed conclusions and recommendations submitted by the Chairperson on the basis of informal consultations

Child and dependant care, including sharing of responsibilities between men and women

1. Questions relating to child and dependant care, to sharing of family tasks and responsibilities and to unremunerated work must be taken fully into account in mainstreaming a gender perspective, in gender analysis and in all other relevant methodologies used to promote equality between men and women.

2. The main lines of action suggested in order to reduce the burden of family responsibilities on women and bring about the sharing of these responsibilities are the following:

A. Recognizing change

3. Economic and social changes - particularly the growing participation of women in economic and social life, the evolving nature of family structures, the feminization of poverty and the link that exists with unremunerated work - and their impact on the capacity of families to ensure the care of children and dependants, as well as the sharing of family responsibilities, including for domestic work, is an issue that affects not only women but society as a whole.

4. As was emphasized in the first plans and strategies drawn up at the national level for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the sharing of family responsibilities and their reconciliation with professional life must constitute a priority objective.

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B. Increasing the role of men in family responsibilities

5. Family responsibilities rest equally with men and with women. Greater participation of men in family responsibilities, including domestic work and child and dependant care, would contribute to the welfare of children, women and men themselves. Even though this change is bound to be slow and difficult, it remains essential.

6. These changes, which imply a change in outlook, can be encouraged by Governments, notably through education and by promoting greater access on the part of men to activities hitherto regarded as women's activities.

C. Changing attitudes and stereotypes

7. It is important to change attitudes towards the status of unremunerated work and the relative role of women and men in the family, the community, the workplace and society at large. Measures taken to this end must be aimed as much at women as at men, and at the different generations, with particular attention to adolescents.

8. These measures should include recognition of the social and economic importance of unremunerated work, and should aim at desegregating the labour market through, inter alia, the adoption and application of laws embodying the principle of equal pay for women for equal work or work of equal value.

9. The essential role of the educational system, particularly in primary schools, in changing the perception of the role of girls and boys, must be recognized. The role of national mechanisms and of non-governmental organizations in promoting change is a major one.

D. Adapting the legal system

10. There is a need, through legislation and/or other appropriate measures, to rebalance the sharing of family responsibilities between men and women, and to inform them of the existing legislative provisions.

11. Reconciliation of work-related and family responsibilities and the development of a legislative framework for ensuring child and dependant care (particularly of the elderly and disabled) must be promoted by society as a whole, including management and labour, and by Governments. The latter must be the main agents of change.

12. Action is needed to:

(a) Promulgate and apply laws and other measures to prohibit all forms of direct or indirect discrimination based on gender or matrimonial status, inter alia with reference to family responsibilities;

(b) Promote laws on maternity leave;

(c) Promote legislative measures, incentives and/or measures of encouragement that would enable men and women to take parental leave and save

social security benefits. Such measures should protect working men and women against dismissal and guarantee their right to re-enter employment in an equivalent post;

(d) Promote conditions and a way of organizing work that would enable women and men to reconcile their family and professional life, particularly through the introduction of flexi-time for women and men;

(e) Eliminate the differences in remuneration between women and men for equal work or work of equal value, and promote the development of non-discriminatory methods of evaluating work and their inclusion in wage negotiations;

(f) Work actively towards ratification of or accession to and implementation of international and regional human rights treaties;

(g) Ratify and accede to and ensure implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women so that universal ratification can be achieved by the year 2000;

(h) Ensure the application of laws and guidelines and encourage the adoption of voluntary codes of conduct which guarantee that international labour standards, such as International Labour Organization Convention No. 100 on equality of remuneration of men and women for equal work or work of equal value, apply equally to working women and working men;

(i) Encourage the participation of women in bodies responsible for negotiating working conditions. In this respect, it is interesting to note the relationship that exists between the proportion of women participating in negotiations on working conditions and the importance attached to this problem;

(j) Encourage social security regimes to take into account the time spent by working men and women in child and dependant care.

E. Adopting and promoting a family support programme and encouraging reconciliation of family and professional life for women and men

13. It is essential to define, at the national, regional and local levels, a family support programme that is based on the principle of equal sharing of family responsibilities and is consistent with the policies for promoting equality in the labour market and protecting the rights of the child. Particular attention should be paid to single-parent families. There is a need, where necessary, to revise legislation so that women are no longer defined as "minors" and/or dependants and to ensure that they enjoy the same access to resources as men.

14. The State and society at large have a responsibility for child and dependant care. This responsibility is reflected in the adoption of an integrated approach at the local and national levels in order to ensure access to affordable and reliable services for the children and dependants (particularly those who are elderly and disabled) of women and men who are working, undergoing training, studying or seeking employment. This

responsibility can also take the form of incentives for parents and employers, of a partnership between local authorities, management and labour, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, and of the provision of technical assistance and access to vocational training.

15. With a view to complementing the efforts being made in this direction by Governments, international financing institutions should be encouraged to take into account the growing need for financing to establish day-care nurseries, particularly in areas where there is a greater concentration of poverty, in order to facilitate the training of mothers or their entry into paid employment.

16. Child and dependant care is capable of constituting a major source of new jobs for women and for men.

17. The burden of domestic work needs to be eased through drinking water and energy supply, making use of appropriate technologies.

F. Developing research and information exchange

18. Research could be conducted drawing on the capabilities of the various United Nations agencies, particularly in the following areas, when compatible with the System-wide Medium-term Plan:

(a) Changes in the situation and attitudes of men and women with regard to the reconciliation of family and professional life and the sharing of family responsibilities - in particular, a study should be conducted in the context of sub-Saharan Africa;

(b) Compilation of data on the unremunerated work which is already taken into account in the United Nations system of accounts, for example in agriculture and other types of non-mercantile production activity;

(c) Collection and exchange of information on the different systems that exist for alimony payments;

(d) Unremunerated work which addresses the measuring and value of their work, within the framework of the implementation of the Platform for Action;

(e) Time-use surveys of unremunerated work of women and men, with a view to measuring its impact on the use and monitoring of economic and social policies.

G. Promoting change through international cooperation

19. The Commission on the Status of Women recommends to the Economic and Social Council that all the strategies and policies of the United Nations and of Member States designed to promote gender equality should take fully into account child and dependant care, sharing of family work and responsibilities between men and women, and unremunerated work, as integral parts of the concept of equality between men and women.

20. The Commission on the Status of Women recommends to the Economic and Social Council that the suggestions contained in this document be taken into account in defining the policies of the United Nations system, as well as those of Member States.